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February 11, 2015

UNH Research Finds Rural Students Have Less Access to Advanced Placement Courses

DURHAM, N.H. – Nearly one half of rural school districts have no secondary students enrolled in advanced placement (AP) courses, compared to only 20 percent of town, 5 percent of suburban and less than 3 percent of urban districts, according to new research at the Carsey School of Public Policy at the University of New Hampshire.

“These findings have worrisome implications regarding equal access to educational opportunity, as some studies have documented the academic benefits of simply engaging in such rigorous coursework,” the researchers said. “Completing AP coursework may give students valuable experience, and college credit is often earned through success on end-of-year examinations.”

The research was conducted by Douglas Gagnon, a former research assistant at the Carsey School and Marybeth Mattingly, director of research on vulnerable families at the Carsey School and research assistant professor of sociology at UNH.

The researchers also found that access to AP coursework in rural districts – which educate roughly one-quarter of all U.S. students – varies according to district location and size. For example, remote rural districts with small populations are nearly 10 times less likely to offer access to AP courses than are larger rural districts on the fringe of urbanized areas. AP success rates are highest in suburban districts, and that success is higher than in town and rural districts even when affluence is accounted for.

“Based on this research, it is important that educators, administrators and policy makers continue to look for ways to boost success in college-level coursework, perhaps through targeted teacher professional development, financial support for low-income students and a re-examination of student expectations.”

This research is based on data from the 2011-12 Civil Rights Data Collection, the 2012 Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates and the 2010 Decennial U.S. Census. The research brief is available at <http://scholars.unh.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1234&context=carsey>.

The Carsey School of Public Policy conducts policy research on vulnerable children, youth, and families and on sustainable community development, giving policy makers and practitioners timely, independent resources to effect change in their communities.

The [University of New Hampshire](http://www.unh.edu), founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with

the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,300 undergraduate and 2,200 graduate students.

Editors: Researchers Douglas Gagnon and Marybeth Mattingly are available to discuss the results of this study. Gagnon can be reached at djb492@unh.edu, Mattingly at beth.mattingly@unh.edu and 240-593-4297.

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